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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2018
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SUBJECT: GENERAL WARD'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT TOURE

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(S) Summary: General Ward and the Ambassador met with President Amadou Toumani Toure on February 26 to discuss security in northern Mali. The meeting with the President followed a separate meeting with Minister of Defense Natie Pleah and senior Malian military leadership (septel). President Toure welcomed the creation of AFRICOM and expressed his deep appreciation for General Ward's visit. The President said U.S. military training has yielded qualitative improvements in the Malian Army and asked for increased training opportunities. A Powerpoint presentation by the Malian Military Chief of the General Staff, General Seydou Traore, and the Malian Chief of Staff of the Army, Colonel Gabriel Poudiougou, requested more training, intelligence sharing, and materiel so Mali may strengthen garrisons based in northern Mali, create a new garrison in Taoudenni, and stand-up several smaller outposts in towns like Tinzwaten and In-Khalil. Following this presentation, President Toure met privately with General Ward and the Ambassador to reiterate, on a personal level, his support for AFRICOM and General Ward. During this meeting the President made it clear that Algeria must be on board for any general or specific actions targeting Islamic extremists in northern Mali to succeed. End Summary.

Toure Requests Increased Assistance

2.(C) President Toure warmly welcomed General Ward and the creation of AFRICOM during a meeting at the Presidency in Bamako. President Toure opened the meeting by noting that he had just returned from Washington where he met with President Bush and officials at the Pentagon. He described these meetings as highly successful as they provided him with a rare opportunity to present Mali's concerns about security in the Sahel-Sahara region. General Ward said officials in Washington were extremely impressed by President Toure.

3.(S) The meeting between President Toure, General Ward, the Ambassador and Mali's senior military leadership was animated by a Powerpoint presentation led by Colonel Gabriel Poudiougou and Chief of the General Staff Brigadier General Seydou Traore. General Traore's brief identified porous borders, traffickers looking to turn quick profits by whatever means available, and the Malian military's lack of resources as the key factors behind the continued instability in northern Mali. To combat the GSPC/AQIM, said Traore, Mali must cut off the routes used by drugs, arms and human traffickers, equip Mali's National Terrorism Center and conduct more multi-national exercises like the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), TSCTP and Flintlock. He requested more

US-trained companies, in addition to the three companies equipped in 2004, so Mali may implement a broad plan to reinforce existing garrisons in Tessalit, Kidal, Menaka, and Anefis, create one new garrison in Taoudenni and erect several smaller outposts in key towns like Tinzawaten and In-Khalil.

4.(S) In addition to the current narco-trafficking, banditry, and terrorist threats, the General cited the increased level of oil prospecting activity as another reason why the government wants to boost its security presence in northern Mali. He said each of these units would need to be equipped with 4x4s and lightly armored vehicles. He said US-supplied vehicles and equipment were critical in the Malian Army's response to the 23 May 06 attacks by Tuareg Alliance for Democracy and Change. The presentation described how PSI-supplied vehicles and SOCEUR-trained soldiers were actively engaged in current operations against Tuareg dissident Ibrahim ag Bahanga in the Kidal area. This included photos of military vehicles destroyed over the last six months by mines placed by Bahanga. General Traore concluded with a pitch for intelligence sharing and air support in the form of reconnaissance and combat helicopters in order to ensure the effectiveness of patrols launched from forward bases in northern Mali.

5.(S) General Ward thanked General Traore and President Toure for the presentation and said it highlighted the importance of knowing what is occurring in northern Mali and the need to develop the capacity to control Mali's northern zones. General Ward said Mali's partnership with the U.S. has enhanced both of these elements. He also praised Mali for its willingness to work closely with neighboring countries to address security threats. General Ward expressed hope that the U.S. could help facilitate even greater cross-border cooperation. He said the U.S. would continue to try to secure the assistance requested by Mali and that he would advocate for increased assets on Mali's behalf. General Ward underlined, however, that the case for increased assistance to Mali would be strengthened by the engagement of Malian forces, using equipment and training already provided, against terrorist elements and other threats to security in the north.

6.(S) President Toure said he shared General Ward's point of view and hoped a future meeting of Sahel/Sahara Heads of State in Bamako would help to hash out specific shared policy positions which would enable Mali to better control what amounts to roughly 650,000 sq. km of terrain in northern Mali. Toure said he was counting on U.S. support for this venture. "I would like to assure you," said President Toure, "that it is Mali who needs to fight the Islamists." Toure noted that Mali had recently arrested several Mauritanian and Algerian Islamists. He described cross-border coordination between Mali, Mauritania and Niger as good. Coordination with Algeria, Toure added, was less so. If Algeria could control its borders, said Toure, there would be no Islamists in Mali.

Algeria is the Key

7.(S) Following a general discussion involving General Traore and others, President Toure invited General Ward and the Ambassador to a private meeting. Although this meeting was intended to focus on specific counter-terrorism issues, Toure used the meeting to provide more personal views of what was already discussed. He said Mali wants to help the U.S. counter Islamic extremism but that Mali must deal with its security issues on its own. He said that because most Malian officers were trained in the former USSR, new training opportunities were crucial because the Malian army is relatively young and previous training programs like PSI have revitalized the military and produced qualitative improvements in the commitment and morale of those involved. President Toure said that most of the Malian military's equipment is also from the former Soviet Union. Mali

recently purchased 20 trucks and several helicopters from Bulgaria. Because the Malian military is more familiar with former Soviet equipment, Mali has turned toward suppliers from the former Soviet bloc (although he made clear he hopes for help from the US as well). Toure said Mali does not require complex military hardware, just durable, easy to maintain equipment familiar to Malian soldiers.

8.(S) For Toure, Algeria remains the key to resolving the security situation in the north. He stressed that Algeria must be involved in any solution regarding the Islamic threat in northern Mali. He said he hoped General Ward and AFRICOM could help work toward this end. The President said he had good personal relations with Algerian President Bouteflika but reiterated his belief that members of the Algerian security services in southern Algeria are complicit in illegal trafficking and are acting outside the control of Bouteflika in Algiers. Toure made it clear that Algeria must be on board as part of the team before any general or specific action can be taken against AQIM.

Comment:

19. (C) President Toure and the Malian military leadership have a clear understanding and appreciation for the added value of AFRICOM in unifying US military engagement on the continent, and General Ward's visit was an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the value we attach to the US-Mali relationship. We are encouraged that President Toure is serious about a regional summit to discuss security in the Trans-Sahara region, and Mali's plan to reinforce the north offers opportunities to advance our TSCTP objectives. Recent arrests in Mali of AQIM operatives, and comments by President Toure and other senior Malian leaders about the growing threat in the sub-region suggest that Mali is moving slowly away from the passivity that has characterized the government's approach to security in the north in recent years. At the same time, Mali clearly needs to move from planning to deployment.

110. (U) General Ward has cleared this message.
MCCULLEY